

Underserved Areas

Definition of Underserved Areas

The definition of "underserved" areas should include, at a minimum, those geographic areas defined by the boundaries of school districts eligible for at least an 80% discount under the federal e-rate program.

Reasoning

1. The BTOP's overriding objective is to substantially increase actual utilization of broadband services.
2. Given the BTOP's overriding objective, the definition of underserved areas must encompass areas with low broadband utilization rates.
3. Underutilization of broadband services is by far the most prevalent in low income areas.
4. Demand for broadband services is far less in low income areas primarily because of two barriers: a perceived lack of need for such services, and affordability.
5. The most effective way to increase broadband utilization in low income areas is to stimulate demand through community anchors, which will address both the "perception" and "affordability" barriers.
6. By using the above definition of underserved areas:
 - a. Only areas with very low income levels will be defined as underserved.
 - b. Prompt implementation within the BTOP's deadlines will be enabled.
 - c. Most or all community anchors will be subject to funding.

Support

The key principals and policies underlying Sunesys' definition of "underserved" have widespread support among many commenters. For example,

1. New York City -- Broadband adoption among low-income consumers is very low, and the focus should be on areas with below average rates of broadband adoption.
2. City of Boston -- For many areas "when it comes to broadband, it is not typically an 'access' issue, it is an affordability issue." Among other things, "indicia of unaffordable should include: % of schoolchildren eligible for free or subsidized school lunches."
3. Microsoft Corporation -- "If the US government were to accomplish just one goal in this process, it should be to ensure that all schools, libraries and hospitals across the nation are connected to future-proof broadband facilities, such as fiber-optic cable."
4. One Economy -- "Issues related to adoption, and not deployment, constitute the most significant barrier to low-income Americans using the Internet to improve their lives."